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ABSTRACT

Described is the Preschool for Gifted-Handicapped in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, a 3-year demonstration program for children (3 to 6 years old) who exhibit unusual gifts or talents in spite of physical, mental, emotional, or experiential handicaps. Sections cover four goals of the program: assessment, curriculum, community and parent involvement, and evaluation. Also discussed are some philosophical issues of concern, such as labeling, social considerations, parent expectations, delivery of services, and accountability. (IM)

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PRESCHOOL FOR THE GIFTED-HANDICAPPED:

IS IT UNTIMELY, OR ABOUT TIME?

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The paucity of literature on gifted preschoolers and on gifted-handicapped individuals does not provide any convincing historical support for developing educational programs for gifted-handicapped children. Rather, it is the interest and support in programs for the gifted, in general, that may have catalyzed the now flourishing interest among educators, psychologists, and researchers in the gifted-handicapped. Although giftedness was supported in the literature of fifty years ago (Hollingworth, 1926), it has taken our society several more decades to recognize that gifted children have the right to receive as much attention from teachers and society as children with normal intelligence. At the present time emphasis on creating educational programs for gifted-handicapped is due, in part, to current societal trends and legislative action, two forces which are also active in creating educational programs for handicapped individuals. Governmental support for gifted-handicapped programs arose partially as a result of the compensatory education movement, emphasizing the educational needs of "exceptional" children, and the passing of Public Law 94-142, indicating legislative preference for placing children in mainstreamed settings. This type of legislation is indicative of a general interest in viewing handicapped individuals in terms of capitalizing on their potential as individuals, rather than concentrating only on their disabilities, and is reflected in some recent publications (Mauser, 1975, and Tempest, 1974).

The following paper will demonstrate that many of the issues invoked by the label "gifted-handicapped" are encapsulated in applied programs such as the Preschool for Gifted-Handicapped in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, one of two projects funded by the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped to serve this population. The purpose of this presentation is to put the Chapel Hill program into perspective by evaluating the notion of "gifted-handicappedness," where progress has been made, and where there are ethical issues to be overcome.

Gifted-Handicapped Preschool Program - (Chapel Hill Training-Outreach Project; Anne R. Sanford, Director)

The Gifted-Handicapped Preschool Project is a three-year demonstration program to serve young gifted-handicapped children and their families. The definition of gifted-handicapped used by this project is those preschool children (ages 3 to 6) who exhibit unusual gifts or talents in spite of physical, mental, emotional or experiential handicaps. The children involved in the program may be blind or visually impaired, deaf or hearing impaired, othopedically handicapped, emotionally disturbed, or disadvantaged. Their high performance may be in the areas of general intellectual ability, specific academic aptitude, creative or productive thinking, leadership ability, visual and performing arts, and psychomotor ability.

There are eight major goals of the Chapel Hill Gifted-Handicapped Preschool Program, listed on your handout. Today I will be talking briefly about Assessment, Curriculum, Community & Parent Involvement, and Evaluation.

Assessment.

Specific guidelines for screening and assessment were developed and adopted for use by this project. In developing these guidelines, however, the project had to consider a number of factors that had complicated the identification of young gifted-handicapped children in the past. For example, professionals do not share a common definition of "giftedness," nor do they agree on the procedures one ought to use in identifying gifted children. Of particular concern to the Chapel Hill Project is the questionable predictive ability of standardized tests, especially when administered at the preschool level; the lack of appropriate group tests; and the demonstrated weaknesses in using teacher ratingsfor referrals (Gallagher, 1975)

Another critical problem that the Project had to face in developing their assessment procedure was the dearth of appropriate tests for use with handicapped children. If one were to use a test which is highly verbal in nature with a deaf

child, that child may be penalized because of a lack of experiences usually available to other "hearing" children. Modifying such testing procedures would make the interpretation of results rather questionable. Because appropriate norms for use with the handicapped are rarely available, such children are frequently, and unfairly, compared to the sample of normal children.

The Chapel Hill Project overcame many of the barriers just mentioned by developing a package for training teachers in the identification of potential candidates for the gifted-handicapped program. The rationale for selecting teacher referral as the primary screening technique is the assumption that if one can train teachers in how to identify giftedness, then they may become a valuable screening resource. The Project staff operationalized many of their ideas by developing a slide-tape show for training teachers in the identification of giftedness.

The tape makes it clear that since no single, valid measure for identifying unique talents in children exists, teachers and other professionals must use a variety of techniques for this purpose. The following four assessment techniques have been suggested by the Project:

(1) Unstructured observations: Teachers often make these observations, by recognizing a particular child's unusual artistic skills, for example. Parents, too, make unstructured observations of their own children at home. The Project urges teachers to take advantage of information that can be provided by parents.

(2) Checklist technique: This is simply a way for teachers to obtain more specific identification information. The following items are a few of those suggested by the Chapel Hill Training-Outreach Project to be included in an identification checklist. Note that a gifted child need have only some, not all, of these characteristics:

--learns rapidly, easily and efficently

--asks many questions, is interested in a wide range of things

--is original, uses good but unusual methods or ideas

----prolonged attention span

(3) Structured observation: This is a "preplanned" activity which a teacher might use during a specified time period. The types of information obtained in a structured observation are (a) frequencies with which a particular behavior occurs; and (b) the kinds of behavior which occur within a specified time period.

(4) Sociometric measures: This type of measure can be used by the teacher to gather information on unusual abilities and leadership characteristics that the children alone can provide. The measure requires children to name those whom they think would be best in a given situation or activity. The sociometric measure may be less reliable than the other three assessment techniques mentioned here, but it can yield valuable information if used in conjunction with one or more other procedures.

Curriculum.

The Project curriculum is based on the unit-concept approach. According to this approach, instruction is organized around a central concept or theme and can be applied to such diverse content areas as the study of a certain country; holidays; or animals. In addition, the Project utilizes a model which assures the specification of program objectives, Blooms' Taxonomy of the Cognitive Domain (1956). The Chapel Hill Project staff has developed a model for adapting Bloom's taxonomy to a preschool curriculum. In an article by Baily and Leonard (1977), it is pointed out that the model curriculum is not intended to emphasize six discrete levels of functioning, as emphasized by Bloom, but to suggest a continuum of skills.

At the Chapel Hill Project, this adaptation of Bloom's taxonomy is part of a much larger curriculum approach. Children also receive individual therapy or lessons as needed, and the opportunity to participate in recreation, music, art, play, and discovery learning acitbities. Hence, the model curriculum adopted for use by the Chapel Hill Gifted-Handicapped Program is oriented within a definite framework, but it incorporates a number of ideas in a conscious attempt to consider a variety of curricular options.

Community and Parent Involvement.

The Chapel Hill Training-Outreach Project hopes to mobilize community resources, such as doctors, mental health agencies, screening programs, etc. in an effort to involve them in delivering services to the gifted-handicapped population. This kind of community involvement will allow the Chapel Hill Program to assume an "advocacy" role. For instance, if some doctor, agency or professional in western North Carolina identifies an intellectually gifted blind child, the Chapel Hill Program could help find an appropriate placement for the child and provide curriculum materials to that child's teacher. Eventually, the Chapel Hill Project may actively assume this consultant-role and work more to identify young gifted-handicapped children on a statewide basis and to disseminate appropriate training packages, rather than operating just the center-based preschool in Chapel Hill on a full-time basis. This expansion will include disseminating materials and services to regular day-care centers, church groups, and recreation programs such as the YMCA organization. At the same time that the project staff hopes to arouse a community interest and concern in the gifted-handicapped, the staff hopes to offer their own knowledge and skills on an outreach, service delivery basis.

In addition to inviting community involvement, the Project is actively working with the parents of gifted-handicapped children. There are basically four activities by which the Project keeps parents informed about the activities in the program, and about the progress of the children in the program. Both individual and group parent meetings open up communication between the program staff and parents. Furthermore, newsletters and periodic reports are sent to the parents of each child, describing the child's progress in the program and future objectives. All parents are also urged to spend time observing their children in the classroom. This type of parent interaction with the program may encourage parents to follow-up their child's progress in the classroom by participating in similar activities in their home.

A very critical element in the parent component of the gifted-handicapped project is the involvement of parents in the program evaluation process. Parents have been asked to evaluate the appropriateness of the gifted-handicapped program for their child. Questionnaires designed for this purpose asks parents things like "Do you feel that participation in the gifted-handicapped program has been a worthwhile experience for your child? Do you feel that your child's participation in this program has been a worthwhile experience for you as a parent?" Parents are encouraged to elaborate on their yes-no answers with comments, or suggestions for changes in the program. The fact that 82% of the parents completed and returned the evaluation forms suggests that the gifted-handicapped program staff has effectively established channels of communication with the parents.

Evaluation.

A critical component of the Chapel Hill Gifted-Handicapped Project is its ongoing evaluation of program goals and objectives. Project goals, procedures for implementing the goals, and goal outcomes are continually assessed. Rather than delineating the program's evaluation strategy in detail, two of its components will be described below: the evaluation of pupil progress, and teacher evaluations. (Note that parent evaluations have been described previously, and constitute a very important part of the overall evaluation plan.)

One strategy chosen to assess the progress of each individual child in the gifted-handicapped program is a case study report. Each case study includes detailed descriptions of the classroom objectives for the child, evaluation of general academic and behavioral progress, and recommendations.

An evaluation of program services must also be completed by the "regular" teachers of the children enrolled in the gifted-handicapped project. These are the teachers in whose classrooms the gifted-handicapped children were before they were enrolled in the Chapel Hlll Training-Outreach Project. The purpose of

such teacher evaluations is to provide feedback about what goes on in the special gifted-handicapped program, and to solicit teachers' assistance in determining future directions for project efforts. Questions posed to teachers sought answers to such things as (a) how, or why, they suspected that a certain child was gifted (if they suspected that the child was gifted); (b) what their feelings were about the gifted-handicapped program; (c) what they felt was an ideal educational arrangement for gifted-handicapped children.

The Chapel Hill Gifted-Handicapped Project found itself serving a population toosmall and heterogeneous for traditional evaluation procedures. The result of efforts by the project to devise an appropriate evaluation plan have been to collect as many pieces of information on each child and family as possible in order to look at and interpret change.

PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are still some unresolved issues that plague the development of services for the gifted-handicapped. Many of these same issues confront professionals involved in preschools for the gifted as well.

Labeling the Gifted-Handicapped: A Double-Label

To argue the advantages and disadvantages of labeling children is to argue a now very moot point. When referring to the gifted-handicapped, both "handicapped-gifted" and "gifted-handicapped" have been used. However, there are two issues at hand here. First of all, is it necessary to include the label "handicapped" at all? Why not just identify and deliver services to preschool GIFTED children, handicapped and nonhandicapped alike? In other words, why not focus on the child's "strength," rather than his/her "deficit," by retaining just the gifted label. Also, the gifted-handicapped child may be affected socially and emotionally by both his/her label and special educational placement. The double label, gifted-handicapped, may actually make these children seem even MORE different to their peers, parents and teachers. It is possible that a gifted-handicapped child

would benefit more by being called just gifted, or in some rare cases, just handicapped!

It may be that inclusion of the word "handicapped" in the label serves as an aid to both more accurate identification of these children, and more individualized instruction and service delivery. Thus, it seems that the gifted-handicapped label can only be evaluated accurately when considered separately for each individual. Like other labels, if the gifted-handicapped label means that services previously nonexistent will be made available to the child, then the label is an asset. If it means nothing, i.e., no services or benefits are available to the gifted-handicapped child, the child may actually suffer socially and emotionally, instead of being guided intellectually and educationally.

Social Considerations.

It appears that much of the current emphasis in preschools for the gifted, and for the gifted-handicapped, is on program planning and academics. There is a critical need for more current research on the social and emotional characteristics of the gifted. Although there appears to be evidence showing the superior emotional adjustment of the intellectually gifted, much of this evidence has been derived primarily from studies done as long ago as the 1950's (Gallagher and Crowder, 1957; Lightfoot, 1951; Mensh, 1950) and the 1960's (Nichols and Davis, 1964; Lucito, 1964).

Parent Expectations and Attitudes.

There is little in the literature to indicate just what the effect of a gifted child is on his/her parents, and vice versa. In a study by Pringle (1970) it was shown that parental expectations of a gifted child in general have been too high, thus causing emotional problems, or in some cases, underachievement. Surely overanxious parents might be detrimental to a child's motivation or progress! The child who is doubly labeled as gifted and handicapped may be forced to cope with a double problem; that of coping with his/her handicap, while at the

same time living up to parent expectations as a "gifted" child.

Incidence and Prevalence Vs. Amount of Resources.

What is the extent of the problem? In North Carolina, for example, the Chapel Hill Training-Outreach Project for the Gifted-Handicapped developed a program whereby teacher referrals became an important part of the identification/assessment procedure. Gifted-handicapped children were assessed in approximately six types of schools or centers, including a school for the blind, a school for the hearing impaired, and a school for children with cerebral palsy. There was a TOTAL of only 31 referrals to the program, of which 11 were selected for class participation.

From a very practical viewpoint, the incidence and prevalence of gifted-handicapped individuals must be known, and compared with the available resources (i.e., personnel and money) before one can justify special programming for this population.

Accountability.

Another factor that must be considered during the incipient stages of a new educational program, e.g., the preschool project for gifted-handicapped children, is the issue of accountability. To whom does the teacher and school for the gifted-handicapped become accountable - the parents, the teacher in the "regular" class where the gifted-handicapped child will eventually be mainstreamed, or the gifted-handicapped child receiving service?

As much as educators, and almost everyone else, dislike cost and money issues, it is imperative that we consider the financial obligations of a pre-school for gifted-handicapped children. How does cost affect the overall service delivery of such a program? Finally, what is the potential viability of such a program, i.e., what is the likelihood that this program will be picked up by the community? The answer to this final question can have significant educational implications for preschool programs for gifted-handicapped children.

Conclusions - PRESCHOOL FOR THE GIFTED HANDICAPPED: IS IT UNTIMELY, OR ABOUT TIME?

There are two sides to the "timeliness" issue regarding preschool for the gifted handicapped. Such a program is yet "untimely," for a variety of reasons. Identification procedures for young gifted-handicapped children are still quite crude; in fact, the whole notion of a gifted-handicapped child is not yet fully accepted by educators. There is a tendency, and desire, to fund more gifted-handicapped projects before many of the peripheral philosophical issues are considered. Also, in this "era of mainstreaming" it seems like a counter-productive maneuver to identify another "exceptional" population which will need additional appropriate educational services.

Nevertheless, the time is opportune for funding model gifted-handicapped programs and getting them underway. This will, in turn, speed up the development of identification procedures and curricula. Many parents and teachers who have "suspected" that a particular handicapped child was gifted often react favorably to such a notion.

The whole area of the gifted, including research in giftedness, is so relatively new that it doesn't seem possible that it's TOO early to begin... surely, "its about time" that special educators look to model projects like the Chapel Hill preschool for gifted-handicapped children with enthusiasm and support!

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(Paper presented at The Council for Exceptional Children
55th Annual International Convention, Atlanta, April, 1977)

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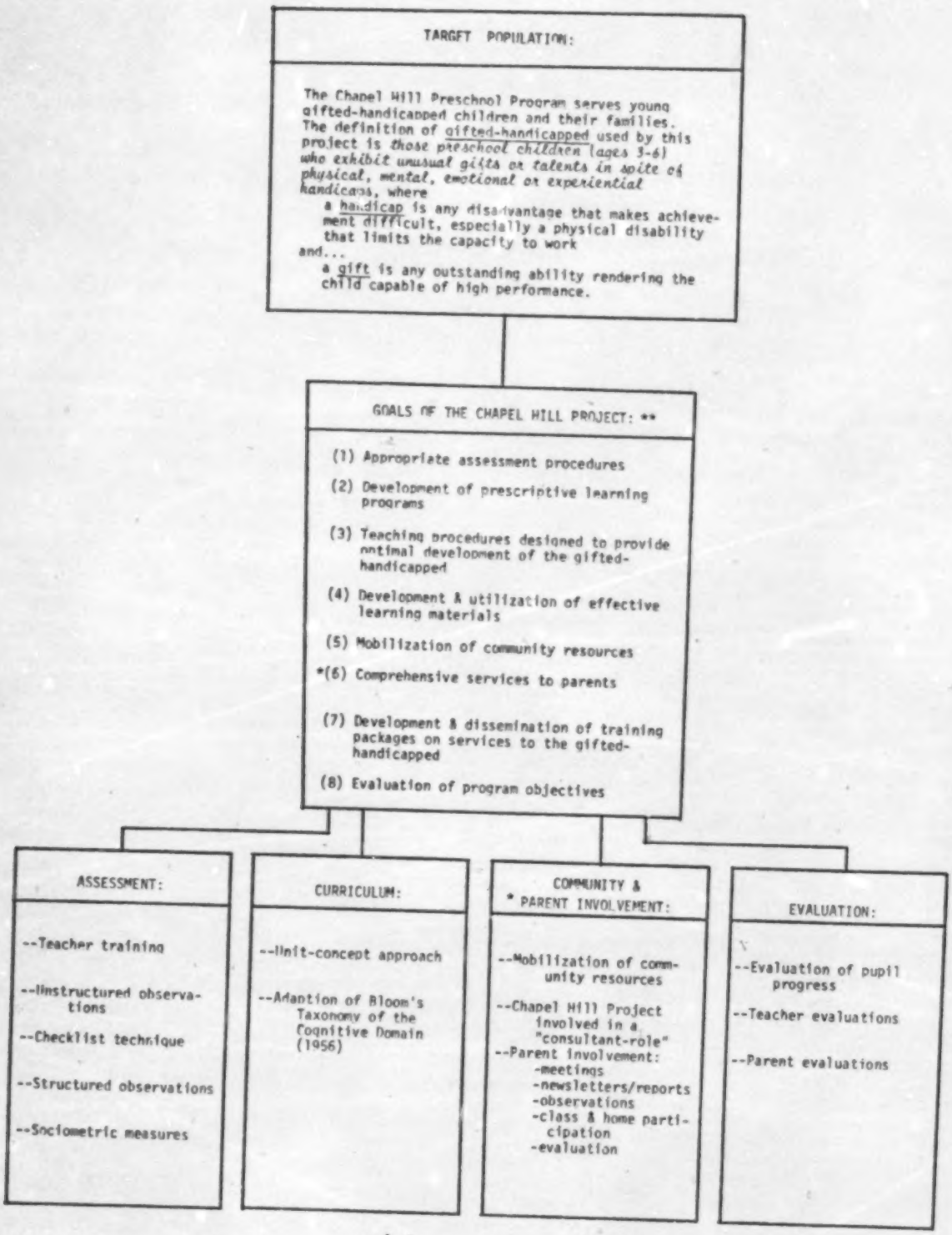
TARGET POPULATION:
The Chapel Hill Preschool Program serves young gifted-handicapped children and their families. The definition of gifted-handicapped used by this project is those preschool children (ages 3-6) who exhibit unusual gifts or talents in spite of physical, mental, emotional or experiential handicaps, where
a handicap is any disadvantage that makes achievement difficult, especially a physical disability that limits the capacity to work
and...
a gift is any outstanding ability rendering the child capable of high performance.
GOALS OF THE CHAPEL HILL PROJECT: **
(1) Appropriate assessment procedures
(2) Development of prescriptive learning programs
(3) Teaching procedures designed to provide optimal development of the gifted-handicapped
(4) Development & utilization of effective learning materials
(5) Mobilization of community resources
*(6) Comprehensive services to parents
(7) Development & dissemination of training packages on services to the gifted-handicapped
(8) Evaluation of program objectives
ASSESSMENT:
--Teacher training
--Unstructured observations
--Checklist technique
--Structured observations
--Sociometric measures
CURRICULUM:
--Unit-concept approach
--Adaption of Bloom's Taxonomy of the Cognitive Domain (1956)
COMMUNITY & * PARENT INVOLVEMENT:
--Mobilization of community resources
--Chapel Hill Project involved in a "consultant-role"
--Parent involvement:
-meetings
-newsletters/reports
-observations
-class & home participation
-evaluation
EVALUATION:
--Evaluation of pupil progress
--Teacher evaluations
--Parent evaluations

**Gifted-Handicapped Project: A grant under the direction of the Chapel Hill Training-Outreach Project:Anne P.Sanford, Director

PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

ISSUES OF CONCERN

LABELING

Why not focus on the child's strength, rather than his/her deficit, by retaining just the "gifted" label?

SOCIAL CONCERNS

How are young gifted-handicapped children perceived by others, as they interact with and participate in social groups? How are they affected by their physical and intellectual characteristics?

PARENT EXPECTATIONS

Is the child who is doubly-labeled as gifted AND handicapped forced to cope with a double problem, i.e., coping with the handicap, while at the same time living up to parent expectations of a "gifted" child?

DELIVERY OF SERVICES

How can adequate, appropriate services be provided to a population whose size is unknown?
What is the likelihood that a model program will be picked up and supported (financially) by the community?

ACCOUNTABILITY

To whom do the teacher and school for the gifted-handicapped become accountable - the parents; the teacher in the "regular" class where the child will eventually be mainstreamed; or the gifted-handicapped child him/herself?

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